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ABSTRACT

The actions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards with regard to national teaching standards and an associated examination are critiqued. The board was established on the basis of a recommendation by an advisory council of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy. The board, which is composed of politicians, business executives, teacher unionists, and teachers, was approved in 1987. A view of a board-like assessment examination has been outlined by L. S. Shulman and G. Sykes (1986). The examination would present "obscure topic" exercises in which candidates read unfamiliar material and transform the content so that it is appropriate for teaching. The test would also involve adaptation of lessons to students of different backgrounds, interactive computer-based simulations, and computer-controlled laser disks with random access for assessing how the candidate responds to classes that are about to experience a crisis. The analysis of the Sykes and Shulman proposal also covers test content and the proposal's concept of teaching. It is concluded that the proposal represents a threat to institutional variation, premature formalization of teaching, and an implicit bias against students with minority backgrounds. (TJH)

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THE NATIONAL TEACHING STANDARD: ROUTE TO RIGOR MORTIS

Background

The Trustees of Carnegie Corporation established the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy in 1985. Among the first acts of the Forum's Advisory Council was to form a Task Force on Teaching as a Profession aimed at fulfilling the link between economic growth and education and calling for the creation of a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to codify what teachers need to know and be able to do. The Carnegie Forum continued the rash of reports from business interests inferring that poor teaching is the cause of America's lagging competition in world markets.

In an extreme case of the pot calling the kettle black, those most responsible for lost competitiveness - business, industrial leaders and politicians - scapegoat teachers for their own failures. The list of offenses by economic and political leaders is long: failure to aggressively seek world markets, to enter into cooperative trade relations, to encourage saving investments, to invest in technological and human resources, to place quality and reliability before quick profits (remember planned obsolescence?) ...

Although schools have other functions than serving business, the link between schooling and productivity should be forged by stressing how to learn and how to respond to novel situations,

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creativity, international understanding, and social reconstruction rather than adhering to the reformers' push for transmission of fixed conclusions and a national standard for what counts in teaching. Indeed, the Advisory Council has admitted that the education system was designed for a mass-production economy but that the nation now needs people who can think for themselves and act independently and with others (Carnegie 1986).

The full membership of the National Board, composed of politicians, business executives, teacher unionists, and teachers representing a number of subjects and levels, was approved in 1987. Taking an unprecedented action, this Board asked members of Congress to support their bid for 25 million dollars of federal funds for initial research and development of the national test. Once the assessments are developed, the Board anticipates self financing by applications (estimated at 200,000 annually with each applicant paying \$100). Contrary to the principles of competitiveness and accountability the Board would impose on others, the Board wants Congress to entertain no competing proposal and excludes accountability by demanding sole authority to determine the research program, the standards for teaching and the assessment practices generated by the funding.

In keeping with the financial and power orientations of the Board, one might expect a teacher assessment plan that is

consistent with the economic view of humankind - homo-economicus - motivation by external rewards, technical solutions for establishing standards, and efficiency through reproducible procedures. The chief candidate for setting the specifications and standards for the new form of assessment is Lee S. Shulman. Shulman and associates have been developing exemplary sections of what Board-like assessment might be. One of his prototypes aims at assessing the teaching of fractions and the other the teaching of the American Revolution (Shulman 1987a).

Planning for the National Board for Teaching and Examination

Lee Shulman and Gary Sykes have described their view of how the National Board for Teaching and an examination devoted to the assessment of teachers can best occur (Shulman and Sykes 1986). Their candid and comprehensive report gives strategies for gaining acceptance of the exam. They indicate expected sources of revenue and they make clear their intents - to establish what counts in knowledge for teachers, to develop a new system for teacher assessment, to influence state agencies to adopt the standard for licensure, and to get colleges and universities to adjust their curriculum to the standard, thereby introducing uniformity into teacher preparation. Shulman envisions assessment through the following procedures: written assessment, assessment center exercises, documentation of performance during field experiences, and direct observation by trained observers.

The Testing Arcade. Going beyond objective tests, Shulman and Sykes propose a certification test entailing "obscure topic" exercises in which candidates read unfamiliar material transforming the content so that it is appropriate for teaching; "in-baskets" that require adapting lessons to students of different backgrounds; interactive computer-based simulations; and computer-controlled laser disks with random access for assessing how the candidate responds to classes that are about to fall apart or explode. Additional features might include: "ethical problems," filmed classroom sessions, and teaching portfolios submitted by the candidates. Much of the testing will allow for an integrative act of pedagogy - from planning to presenting to evaluating - an improvement over conventional paper and pencil tests of discrete bits of information.

Test Content. The traditional content of teacher education will be assessed: general culture, subject matter knowledge, special and general methods and foundations. Essay and objective tests are to be used to assess knowledge of the liberal arts and literacy. Candidates will be expected to have knowledge about a content field and be familiar with materials and topics taught at different grade levels. They should anticipate difficulties in teaching these topics to students of different backgrounds. Teachers should know the "misinformation" that students bring and

how to transform content so that it is learnable. Emphasis is placed on management skills - establishing rules and routines as well as upon didactic presentation - voice, use of praise, level of questions and other factors from "process product" research on teacher effectiveness. An important area to be tested is the candidate's ability to justify decisions about materials, methods, and strategies.

Concept of Teaching. The proposed assessment plan defines teaching as transmission of knowledge through instruction. As Philip Jackson would say, it is "mimetic" education, the reproduction of knowledge with knowledge possessed first by the teacher alone, then by the student (Jackson 1986). There is no regard for the "transformative" view of teaching as a moral and philosophical undertaking with the teacher not aiming at transmitting any predetermined subject matter in particular but at an altered condition on the part of the student - a transformation. Missing, too, is student-centered teaching as illustrated by Courtney Cazden and Sara Michaels and liberation teaching as exemplified by Paulo Freire.

Hugh Sockett has faulted Shulman, among other things, for omitting the moral framework of teaching and refusing to recognize the tacit knowledge of teachers (Sockett 1987). Such knowledge is resistant to reduction to rules, lacks explanatory power, and is not consistent with Shulman's requirement that knowledge be measured and communicated.

In insisting that the teacher must not be ignorant even when students initiate inquiry, Shulman excludes Rogerian teaching whereby the teacher states his/her own uncertainties and tries to clarify personal puzzlements. Although Shulman footnotes the possibility of student-centered learning, he is clearcut in affirming the need for teacher superiority in knowledge of both content and method. Consistent with the pedagogical case literature of other efforts aimed at a single standard of teaching within the cult of efficiency, the national examination is associated with a narrowing of the curriculum, recitation, and superficial imitation as opposed to joyous spontaneity, creativity, and open inquiry.

In their emphasis upon controlling behavior and grading, Shulman and Sykes reveal a lack of confidence in learners as origins. Further evidence of a disparaging attitude is seen in their labeling of student alternative conceptual frameworks as "misconceptions" and interpreting student preconceptions that get in the way of acceptance of core topics "cognitive epidemiologies."

The authors posit a set of processes through which all teachers must proceed. These procedures are consistent with pedantic approaches to lesson planning, presentation, evaluation and reflection. Direct teaching methods aimed at putting

knowledge into students' heads are featured rather than indirect approaches that encourage students to construct personal knowledge.

At one level, Shulman approves multiple teaching approaches. He recognizes that particular content and given learners must influence the kind of instruction the teacher offers. Further, he puts more emphasis upon justification by teachers for their actions than upon any specific behaviors they exhibit. At another level, Shulman fosters standardization in teaching, aiming at a single process of pedagogy and the goal of defining, describing, and reproducing "good teaching." To these ends, he relies heavily in documenting content specific teaching, and examining pedagogy from the perspective of expert systems (Shulman and Sykes 1986). Shulman and Sykes suggest developing an artificial intelligence system for the teaching of a particular topic with the goal of creating a computer-based program that can simulate the judgments and decisions of an expert teacher - a prototype for computer-based assessment.

It would be better to recall what has been learned from the study of other creative mental work. Great choreographers, for instance, who are similar to teachers in that they must interact with others - dancers and orchestra - in creating a work, have shown us that great art is best created in multiple ways. Eliot Field begins with music, Merce Cunningham focuses on the spatial logic of movement, Martha Graham finds the source of her

work in literature and philosophy. Instead of imposing "a right way" upon teachers (remember Emerson's comment: "You are trying to make that person into another you - and one's enough," teachers should be encouraged to express their various selves in bringing forth new realizations.

Shulman compares his proposed assessment plan to its weakest contenders - state imposed tests for teachers (tests of basic skills and exams of competence of subject matter). Of course, the Shulman plan is more defensible than such measures. However, it is not necessarily better than assessment procedures that Shulman does not examine - model programs for the assessment of student teachers, interns, and probationary teachers - programs that are noteworthy for their reliability and context validity.

Threat to Institutional Variation

Thus far I have drawn attention to the contradiction between industry's plea for people who are independent learners and a teacher-centered standard which is more appropriate for the routine and dependent demands of the antiquated assembly line. A second contradiction is found in the tension between codification of the knowledge base and evaluating alternatives in teacher education. On the one hand, Shulman and Sykes purport to recognize that the knowledge base for teaching should be ever-changing; and, on the other hand, they seek to introduce

uniformity and permanence into teacher preparation. The great cost for developing tests for even such limited topics as fractions makes it unlikely that tests will be replaced with more appropriate ones at a later date. Teacher educators should be wary of linking teacher education to the standard test and to the use of matched material for preparing candidates to pass it. In addition to the test-driven phenomenon of students bypassing education in studying for the national test, there is the possibility of the school, the college or university losing institutional autonomy and character. The goal of establishing a national standard includes the option of securing the authority of state law to institutionalize the new standard on a uniform basis throughout a jurisdiction. In this way, inquiry into teacher preparation and the development of innovations based on other philosophies are precluded. One is reminded of how teacher education has been enhanced by alternatives such as those offered in child development approaches (Bank Street) and humanistic social reconstruction programs (Antioch). Shulman himself has recognized the possible deleterious consequences of a teaching profession that becomes nothing but a guild of individuals intent on protecting their knowledge and expertise in the interest of the economic or status goals they pursue (Shulman 1987 b).

A Contradiction in Terms - Exclusive Common Knowledge

There is another major contradiction in the proposal - identification of expert knowledge consistent with popular

opinion; something like the old joke, "What we need is a brand new idea that is fully tested." Shulman seeks to stake a claim for exclusive and expert knowledge. He holds that professionalization rests upon specialized knowledge that is not in the common realm. However, political considerations lead him to validate professional knowledge against the status quo. Only that which is acceptable or has face validity to teachers, administrators, policy makers, and the public at large will be tested. Surely, authoritative knowledge of teaching must be more than prevailing opinion derived from tradition, personal experiences, wish fulfillment, and the like. The validity of the proposed test would be established on grounds that the content matches content related to the job of teaching (a relation that favors teaching as it is, not as it should be). The expert knowledge base of Shulman is neither justified on empirical grounds nor by evidence of predictive validity. (There is no evidence that one's performance on the test would predict how the teachers would teach in a real classroom over extended time.) Neither is there any basis other than political expediency for determining how well a teacher should do on the national test to demonstrate excellence. The national standard would be an arbitrary one.

In making the case for pedagogical knowledge, however, Shulman appeals to teacher effectiveness research and refers to

application of this research in state assessments. The Florida Performance Measurement System, for example, is cited as a source in which teaching behaviors have been categorized into domains of teaching and used in identifying strong and weak teachers. Proponents of the Florida system report a low correlation (.31) between their teaching behaviors and student achievement, indicating that more than 90 percent of the variance cannot be accounted for by the teaching skills assessed, an inadequate basis for decisions to employ, retain, or certify individuals (Peterson 1985). Teacher effectiveness research is valuable for the analytic framework it offers and for drawing attention to variables that might be manipulated by the teacher in the interests of improving a teaching situation; but it is not a sufficient basis for an authoritative standard of teaching.

Social Consequences of the National Standard

In addition to the negative consequences of lost institutional autonomy and premature formalization of teaching, there is no reason to believe that the examination would benefit minority members who are being eliminated by state literacy testing. Indeed the justification and verbal reasoning demanded by the Shulman prototype is likely to favor dominant cultural groups.

Shulman continues the practice of blaming victims and their preparation rather than considering assessment that would reveal the teaching strengths of those from minority cultures. There is

nothing in the planned examination that will identify teachers who can best situate learning in the minority culture and respond to its themes, literacy, aspirations, and understandings. Instead there is to be testing of the teacher's familiarity with cultural stereotypes and whether or not the teacher makes predetermined responses to them.

Conclusion

Shulman and Sykes have provided a well-outlined view of teaching and have suggested interesting approaches to teacher assessment. Their model has implications for innovations in teacher education. It is unfortunate that their perspective is offered as the defining view of teaching excellence rather than an alternative for analysis and evaluation. The proposal would close the door to views that are more consistent with the democratic concern for critical and active learners and with industry's need for productivity.

Paradoxically, the proposed standards are likely to perpetuate the teacher-dominated lesson and the transmitting of information - a teaching model that closely parallels those aspects of American industry associated with its decline - a top-down hierarchy, learned dependence, routine, and reproduction.

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